



NEWS RELEASE

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New Era for Soil Survey

As the initial survey of U.S. soil conditions and resources nears completion, the National Cooperative Soil Survey (NCSS) program is shifting its resources to updating and enhancing existing soil resource information. This new era will focus on improving the consistency of soils information on a Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) basis, ignoring political boundaries, and promoting and providing technical assistance and education to our customers and land use decision makers. Leading this new effort are the newly created Major Land Resource Area Soil Survey Offices (MLRA SSOs). While Colorado will eventually host five, three are already up and open for business.

The three operating MLRA SSOs in Colorado are located in Alamosa, Ft. Morgan, and Pueblo. The remaining two will be located in Ft. Collins and Grand Junction. In addition to the five Colorado locations, MLRA SSOs in Rock Springs, Wyoming; Price, Utah; Scotts Bluff, Nebraska; Garden City, Kansas; and Grants, New Mexico will provide service to smaller corners of Colorado. *“Selecting the locations of the MLRA soil survey offices around the country was arduous,”* says Steve Park, NRCS State Soil Scientist/MLRA Region 6 Team Leader, Lakewood, CO. *“Careful consideration was taken at the state and national levels to determine the best placement of the MLRA Soil Survey Offices. Negotiations were long and difficult and involved many different partners.”*

“The establishment of these offices is vital to achieving the mission of the soil survey program set forth by the Agricultural Appropriation Act of 1896,” Park further states.

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Over the years soil surveys had been conducted mostly on a county basis which has resulted in a quilt-work pattern of soils information proving to be inconsistent on political boundaries. These newly developed MLRA Soil Survey Offices will ignore political boundaries, resulting in a seamless, more consistent inventory of soils coverage. These offices will also provide the opportunity to enhance existing soils data collected during the initial phases of the soil program.

“The program began well over 100 years ago with the first soil survey ever conducted. Our knowledge and technology has changed over the years as well as the conditions of the soils first inventoried,” Park states. *“These offices offer tremendous opportunity for our partners and land use decisions makers. In addition to improved and more consistent soils information and products, these offices will allow us to go back and do some of the things we are doing now but were not able to do at the beginning of the soil survey program: things like gathering new and different data to enhance the science of soils, and sampling and long-term monitoring of dynamic soil properties, including carbon sequestration and many other properties.”* The soil survey staff will also provide technical services, assist with the natural resources inventory and assessment projects, and provide training and overall support to users of soil survey information.

USDA’s National Cooperative Soil Survey Program is a cooperative effort led by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through other Federal and state agencies and numerous other entities which make up the NCSS partners.

The Ft. Collins and Grand Junction MLRA Soil Survey Offices will be up and running in the spring of 2008, and all NRCS MLRA soil survey offices are scheduled to be functional by the end of 2009. *“I am really excited about these offices,”* affirms Park. *“I think they will be the best jobs in the agency. Their duties will be multi-faceted with high job satisfaction, a switch*

from the grinding duties of conducting initial soil surveys day-after-day, year-after-year. The initial soil survey product for this country is the best in the world, but it is not without its problems. With this new structure, political boundaries will be ignored, resulting in seamless and consistent soils coverage. We will be taking a great product now and making it even better, ensuring that one of our most precious natural resources is protected for future generations.”